



Panning for gold. Courtesy of Wells Fargo Historical Services, San Francisco, CA 94163

## BOOK REVIEW

# *The New Encyclopedia of the American West*

by Howard R. Lamar, Yale University Press, 1998, \$60.00

A case cannot be made for this handsome volume enhancing physicians' skills or understanding. It has no entry for medicine, despite western medical service, policy, or research, and it ignores the Oregon Health Plan—the first example of a peacetime government explicitly rationing health care. There is meager mention of the one fatality in Lewis and Clark's expedition—a member who died a few weeks out at Council Bluffs, Iowa, probably from a ruptured appendix. The book neglects mentioning that Lewis and Clark used medical services to help negotiate peaceful passage across the many domains of Native Americans. The squaws brought their children along for medical treatment, and the warriors were happy to let the benefactors pass without harm. There is no detail of the time Clark spent with Dr Benjamin Rush in Philadelphia, learning about medicine. Rush gave Clark powerful emetics to carry along, and the men would joke about "Rush's bullets." So why would any physician wish to buy this historical encyclopedia, as I did, prior to being asked to review it? My interest chiefly lay in learning about the "winning of the West," that latter day crusade pursued with the zeal of the 11th century quest of Jerusalem.

Most readers will buy the 1,324 pages of alphabetically ordered passages to further

their childhood imagination. The magic of the Wild West is made real in the universal childhood game of cowboys and Indians, a necessary part of growing up to become a red-blooded American.

Perhaps it is asking too much of an encyclopedia to convey, among the parade of facts, the passion involved in the winning of the West. Some passion is there, but scattered among the references. Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo of the early forest gives way to Mike Fink of the Mississippi, then to Deadwood Dick and Calamity Jane of dime novels fame. Then comes Wild Bill Cody with his Indian sidekicks' traveling road show, who evolves into Tom Mix and Hoot Gibson and then into John Wayne, the Zeus of Hollywood.

Perhaps too, it needs more than a brief reference in the "Environmental History of the West," for insight into the present western environmental guerrilla war. The clear-cut wilderness between the Pacific Ocean and Northwest Cascade, euphemistically called "shelter wood cut" by the Forest Service, is referred to in the encyclopedia as forest. This is far from factual when only five percent of the original forest remains intact.

There's a similar problem with the "Fisheries" section, in which little mention is made of the plight of exploited salmon. The ency-

clopedias states, "Because all sides rejected the idea of limited participation, a central feature of fishing regulation in the West has been inefficiency." Nothing is mentioned of the fish fights of the 1880s when gill netters and trap fishermen ambushed each other while also fighting the canneries—forcing the governor to call out the National Guard.

Under "Reclamation and Irrigation," mention is made of the Bureau of Reclamation becoming the target of the "new conservationists," but the fierce battles going on between industry and agriculture and concerned citizens over deconstructing the West's mighty dams are not detailed.

The change in America's attitude from believing in unlimited resources to realizing people must work together to preserve the environment appears as scholarly notes rather than the next stage in the crusade to save the West. It's like reading an encyclopedia of Western Europe that fails to mention World War II.

The references reveal more omissions than errors. C.S. Price, the recognized Western artist, is referenced, yet John Reed, his contemporary Portlander, a world recognized journalist, draws a blank. The material on the lost state of Franklin is excellent but where is the proposed state of Jefferson, that unborn political ambition of the northern tier of California and the southern tier of Oregon counties, which for so long has tempted them to break away and form an "authentic" Western state?

If you are uninterested in a message but happy in a series of good reads, settle down to this book. The full and accurate account of the fur trade, with its rapsallion murderers out to kill each other, most Native Americans, and all the beavers in the West is, alone, worth the price. Lamar's account of the vast pageant of questing voyagers—men, women and children—must hold your interest, while haunting readers with the unspoken question of why people remain intent on destroying so much of what we have been blessed with.

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Ralph Crawshaw

*Clinical Professor of Psychiatry,  
Clinical Professor of Public and Environmental Health,  
Oregon Health Services University,  
Portland, OR 97210;  
RCKOS@imagina.com*